DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 303 187 IR 052 647

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TITLE Language, Leadership and Librarians.
PUB DATE 10 Jul 88
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Library Administration and Management Association President's Program at the Annual Convention of the American Library Association (New Orleans, LA, July 10, 1988).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Communication (Thought Transfer); *Communication Skills; *Leadership Styles; *Librarians; *Library Administration; Library Planning

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the use of language as a tool to gain a position of leadership, to improve the caliber of leadership, or to expand the territory of leadership in any situation, and in libraries in particular. The discussion begins with a brief analysis of the process of spoken, written, and nonverbal communication, with an emphasis on nonverbal forms. An overview of the literature of leadership and a review of ways to approach the analysis of leadership are then provided, and the concepts of communication and leadership are related. Applications of the language of leadership in various library situations are then discussed, including interacting with colleagues and patrons and planning. (7 references) (MES)

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LANGUAGE, LEADERSHIP AND LIBRARIANS

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July 10, 1988

IR052647

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LANGUAGE, LEADERSHIP AND LIBRARIANS

The theme of our program, "The Language of Leadership", is an attention-catching, alliterative phrase to identify a topic of critical importance, not just in libraries, but in organizations of all kinds. A great deal of attention recently has been focussed on leadership in American corporations; likewise in the political arena this election year there has been and will continue to be a justifiable need to identify leadership qualities in our potential presidents. Anything which leads to critical thinking on the topic of leadership, whether on a national, organizational or small group level, is probably very healthy, but this paper is concerned not with the outward trappings of leadership as displayed through language, but with the use of language as a tool to gain a position of leadership, to improve the caliber of leadership, or to expand the territory of leadership in any situation, and in libraries in particular.

The purpose of all language is communication. In order to understand how to use the language of leadership most effectively, it is necessary to understand the communication process, a combination of art and science which in some circles has been elevated to the status of "communication enineering". This paper will begin with a brief analysis of the process of

communication (spoken, written and non-verbal), with an emphasis on non-verbal forms, some of which are not normally considered as ways of communicating, but which can have an enormous impact on a target audience. After reviewing the communication aspect, this paper will address the leadership aspect, with an overview of the literature and a review of ways to approach the analysis of leadership. The third section will put the two concepts together and suggest some real-world applications for the theory which has been presented.

Language and Beyond

This section deals with the communication process, and with the surprising kinds of information which are unwittingly conveyed during that process which are not included in the intended message. To understand how this comes about, it helps to remember the separate factors which together make up an act of communication. In its most basic form, communication can be diagrammed as a message "M" which is transmitted from sender "S" to receiver "R":

/S/ --------(M)--------> /R/

This message may consist of words, spoken or written, of pictures in the form of drawings or photographs, of symbols, or of gestures, but in order for communication to take place R must

successfully receive message M from S. In the simplest of all possible worlds, that would be all there was to it, and it is easy to forget in the pressure of daily life and work that successful communication is not as straightforward as our diagram.

If sender S is a real person, he or she carries at all times the combined riches and burdens of experience, learning, personality, ethnic background...to name just a few of the factors which influence the content and transmission of the message S wishes to send. On the other end, R is similarly blessed and burdened, so that with the best will in the world to be open and receptive R may not in fact receive the message which S was trying to send. Furthermore, that good will is often partially lacking, since R may deliberately or unconsciously screen out some of the less welcome incoming information. Add to this confusion the truism that nothing happens in a vacuum:

/S/ --- E ---(M)--- E ---> /R/

S and R are surrounded by their environment, "E", through which the message must pass from one to the other, and that environment may act sometimes as a filter, sometimes as an amplifier so that the message may arrive distorted in any number of ways. Anyone who ever played the children's party game where a sentence which starts out as sensible is whispered around the

table until the last child says aloud a strange and wonderful set of words having no connection with the original will agree that obfuscation occurs more readily than communication. What makes it all so difficult?

Let us start with the message itself, which possesses two attributes of immediate concern: form and content. The message content--the actual information to be transmitted--could in itself occupy an entire book, and in fact volumes have been written about speaking and writing clearly, targeting language to the intended audience, and proven techniques for inducing feedback and assuring comprehension at the other end of the message chain. All of us who have worked a reference desk or ever supervised a single staff member are familiar with the pitfalls of trying to transmit a "simple, straightforward" message.

Less immediately obvious, but of equal importance, is the other message attribute: the form. Consider the impact of hearing that a complaint has been received about your department, delivered three possible ways: (1) passed on informally during a chance encounter near the water fountain, (2) broached formally as a telephone request to attend a meeting about the problem, or (3) raised by memo from the office of the director. Depending on your own personality, your relations with the upper administration and the overall communication practices in your library, any one of these may be interpreted as a signal that a small matter has come up which can be routinely dealt with, or as

a warning of impending disaster. What is your preferred style of communication? Do you switch from voice to paper as problems become more serious? Or do you deal with routine things by memo because there is no urgency, but pick up the phone or hit the warpath in person as matters escalate? The form in which you send or receive the message can mean as much as the content of that message. There is no one "right" way to transmit information, but it is important that the sender(s) and the receiver(s) agree on what the form conveys.

The form of the message, while perhaps the easiest example to analyze, is just one example of non-verbal communication. For most of us, the most familiar non-verbal communication consists of gestures accompanying spoken words. One report claims that "no more than 35% of the social message in a conversation is spoken--the rest is non-verbal".[1] Research on non-verbal communication has been popularized by books such as Julian Fast's Body language; more scholarly works dissect non-verbal signs into performance codes, artifactual codes, mediational codes and contextual codes.[2] Performance codes include gestures, facial expressions and sounds such as laughter or yawns. A speaker on a platform receives constant feedback of this kind from the audience: from the point of view of the platform, head-nodding and note-taking are good signs, while blank stares and watch-checking are not! Artifactual codes most commonly include use of dress and cosmetics, but also include furnishings, art

obects and architecture. The "dress for success" school is based on this very real contribution of clothing to the overall message. Mediational codes come into play, as the name conveys, in various media: the cropping or enlarging of photographs, the choice of color or black-and-white are two examples. The same thought process should go into the selection of color and weight of paper for a resume, or the choice of a formal typed cover memo on letterhead versus a hand-written note clipped casually to the top of a document. A fourth group consists of contextual codes, where time and space are used to support communication. This cosmic sounding manipulation may be as simple as the placement of an administrator's desk squarely facing the entrance to the office, or the scheduling of a staff meeting at 4:30 on Friday afternoon: both convey something about that administrator's attitude to the job and the people.

While not all of these categories are applicable to all communication situations, most of them will be operative most of the time, which brings us to what I consider the ABCs of communication: Attitudes, Behaviors, Choices. Each time sender S communicates something, S knowingly or unwittingly displays an attitude, commits a behavior and makes choices about the subject being addressed or about the receiver of the message. Much has been written in library literature about non-verbal communication at the reference desk: the reference librarian who pores closely over a professional journal while working the desk, treats

questions as untimely interruptions and uses the reference desk chair as a throne from which to point patrons in the right direction is sending out a completely different message than that other stereotype who keeps a weather eye out for bewildered patrons, readily establishes eye contact reinforced with raised eyebrows or smiles, and leaps to a standing position whenever someone approaches the reference desk. Much less has been written about the impact of similar non-verbal messages transmitted by library administrators, who also go through the day displaying a constant stream of attitudes, behaviors and choices. Some applications for these categories of non-verbal communication codes will be discussed in the final section of this paper.

Meanwhile, we move on to the second component of to-day's theme.

Leadership

There are two ways of looking at the concept of leadership in relation to libraries: leadership within the library as practised by members of the library staff, and leadership by libraries and librarians in the world outside the library. Both are valid concepts, and both require well-honed communications skills.

First, however, a word about leadership, as a term which was specifically selected as part of our theme for this conference program. It is significant that we are focussing here on

"leadership" rather than on "management" although we are the Library Administration and Management Association, because management and leadership are not interchangeable. Managers should be able to lead and leaders should be able to manage, but understanding the difference is critical to our success in the future. Management consists of determining measurable, realistic goals and objectives, setting up the operations to achieve those goals, then assessing the results. Leadership consists of getting people together to define the goals, want the goals, and successfully pursue the goals.

There are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are writers on the topic. J. M. Burns opens a text on leadership with the comment that "leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth".[4] Muson in 1921 defined it as "the ability to handle men so as to achieve the most with the least friction and the greatest cooperation".[5] My favorite so far is an unidentified comment from the cover of Kenneth Blanchard's Leadership and the One-Minute Manager: "when the best leader's work is done, the people say 'we did it ourselves!' "[6]

While in many ways leadership is an art with which some people seem to be naturally endowed while others are not (a "leaders are born" approach), in other ways leadership ability consists of identifiable traits and skills which can be analysed, defined and learned (a "leaders are made" approach). Since leadership is such an amorphous concept--everyone "knows" what is

meant by it, but no two people agree on its constituent parts--attempts have been made to segment leadership into a set of skills or a set of traits, in the hope of learning not only how it works, but how to predict who will be a successful leader and who will not.

Two major predictors of success which have been postulated to date are leadership traits and leadership behavior, the theory being that certain attributes and/or certain ways of behaving are more conducive to achieving and maintaining a successful leadership role than others. Typical traits for which almost all studies show positive correlation with successful leadership include high intelligence, initiative, willingness to assume responsibility, self-assurance, emotional stability AND sense of humor! [7]

Leadership behaviors refer more to method or style of leadership. One method of analysis differentiates between task-oriented and people-oriented leadership style. Another differentiates between "supportive" and "directive" behavior on the part of the leader: the directive leader issues orders or instructions, the supportive leader listens, facilitates and encourages followers to develop their own solutions, or a leader may use a blend of the two behaviors. More recently, the term "situational leadership" has come into vogue, along with the view that there is no single "best" style of leadership, but that in any situation there will be a style which will be predictably

better than others. Situational leadership focusses not only on the person in charge (frequently the sender of the message), but also on the subordinate (the receiver of the message) and on the environment of their interaction. Kenneth Blanchard[8] outlines four leadership styles: directing, coaching, supporting and delegating, which he arrives at by setting up a matrix of supportive and directive behavior styles:

	Not Directive	Very Directive
Very Supportive	SUPPORTING	COACHING
Not Supportive	DELEGATING	DIRECTING

The essence of situational leadership is that all four styles are appropriate at certain times: a beginning librarian with little on-the-job training or experience may require "coaching", which the matrix shows to be very supportive AND very directive. A committed librarian learning a new area of competency may require the "directing" approach which teaches how to deal with the new area without having to motivate. These arbitrary categories of course need to be applied with common sense and a sense of humor: remember the days when librarians with ten years experience on the reference desk were learning online searching for the first time? The crux of situational

leadership lies in examining all facets of the situation before selecting a particular style for a particular set of circumstances, and in knowing when to adjust that style as either the circumstances or the people change.

How do traits and styles of leadership, and situational leadership in particular, relate to the communication theory reviewed in the earlier section? The ABCs...attitudes, behaviors, choices...apply to leadership as well as to communication. The classic "Theory X" and "Theory Y" schools of management ("X"--that workers are basically unwilling and need to be constantly prodded and threatened into productivity; "Y"--that workers are intrinsically interested in doing a good job and should be motivated and rewarded accordingly) are explanations of Attitude on the part of management towards workers, and leaders to followers. The librarian who starts with the premise that cooperation and commitment do not come naturally will plan differently, behave differently and certainly communicate differently than the librarian who firmly believes that his or her people want to do the best possible job for the library and for themselves.

Applications

How do we apply the theory outlined here in a real-world, functioning library situation? Most of us feel there is not

enough time in the day to get the work done, let alone to review alphabetical communication theories before picking up the telephone or revving up the word processor. One place to start is by looking at what we're doing now and deciding in the context of communication and leadership what kind of work atmosphere we are fostering with present attitudes, behaviors and choices. For example, the library can be viewed as a communication network, and the information channels within and around it can be analyzed. How does information travel inside the library? Is it "top-down", consisting of a series of directives from the library administration? Is there two-way communication, allowing reactions and feedback from staff during the planning process? Is it largely a "bottom-up" consultative process with staff heavily involved from the beginning? It also helps to look for communication barriers cutting down the information flow between the outside world and the library: library staff need to be aware of what is happening on their campus, in their municipality or in their company which may affect their work. Trustees, campus administrators and corporate staff need to be aware of what goes on in the library in order to appreciate its potential. All of these represent communication channels where the language of leadership can be applied.

Beginning inside the library we have already noted the difference in the image of the library fostered by two exaggerated stereotypes of reference librarian behavior at the

desk, going from intimidating to accomodating. We all try, on our good days at least, to be as friendly and as helpful as possible when dealing with our patrons, but we should also examine our dealings with library colleagues. There are times when it seems impossible to accomplish any work because people are constantly "interrupting"--but people are what keeps the library going; the best budget and the best collection could not be used or useful without the people who provide the organization and access. Applying the language of leadership in the library means many things: it means applying the ABCs of communication in everyday dealings until it becomes second nature to use the right approach, the right tone, the right words to fit the situation.

In planning, in means maintaining a visibly positive and constructive attitude towards patrons, staff and problems. This in turn filters down throughout the organization, encouraging the whole staff of the department, the unit or the branch to view it as a dynamic workplace where the emphasis is on accomplishments, not problems. It means deliberately selecting behaviors which put that department or library in the forefront of the action -- experimenting, demonstrating, acting rather than reacting -- and doing this requires a lot of planning followed by a lot of doing. It means consciously choosing to move ahead rather than hold still, to constantly ask "why" and "why not" and to behave in such a way that the whole team feels comfortable doing the same thing.

In dealing with library staff, applying the lanuage of leadership means adjusting your interactive and management styles to maximize the potential of the particular people in the particular situation. It means making conscious choices which take into account the long-term effects of short-term actions. We all carry on doing our work, some of it routine, some of it challenging, although sometimes the challenge seems to be one of endurance rather than innovation. Communicating in the language of leadership means working to avoid frustrating interactions with colleagues over the routine tasks so that the information channels are cleared and ready for action when interesting assignments or intriguing possibilities appear.

The need for the language of leadership does not diminish outside the library -- if anything, it is even stronger. Librarians need to convey to all those who use and view the library that this is where information management takes place: we acquire it, organize it and store it, in order to provide access to it and disseminate it; we retrieve it, download it, manipulate it, display it and -- perhaps most important of all -- we can teach faculty, students, community patrons and corporate clients how to do it for themselves. Libraries and librarians should be taking the lead in all forms of information management, and seeing the present trend towards greater end-user involvement not as a threat, but as an opportunity for even greater service to our various clienteles.

Whether we are convincing the community of the need for a new approach to resource sharing, or involving the library staff in planning for direct linkage between client workstations and library services, we can and should be the ones in control, building a foundation for the information era to come.

"The genius of a good leader is to leave behind him a situation which common sense, without the grace of genius, can deal with successfully."[9]

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7 Stogdill, 43-96.

8 Blanchard, 68.

9 Walter Lippmann, Roosevelt Has Gone (April 14, 1945)